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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in Hong Kong to determine: (1) if the aims and objectives identified by various groups of students reflect those set out in official course prescriptions; (2) in what ways these aims are similar; and (3) in what ways they are different from officially stated course prescriptions. Participants included a group of 58 uncertified preservice student teachers in their second or third year of a teacher education course, one group of certificated inservice teachers, and one group of uncertificated inservice teachers. The results of the study indicate that there is a mismatch between official aims and the aims recognized by student participants, and suggest that student teachers may be approaching their studies with a narrow view of education as a product rather than recognizing the importance of the overall education process. While the official aims of the Colleges of Education are to develop students to their full potential and to serve the community, 51 percent of the survey respondents stated practical teaching skills as the overall purpose of a teacher education course. The product-oriented view of education suggests that students do not fully understand the role independent study plays in tertiary education. The report concludes that the challenge for teacher educators may be that students still need to be taught how to learn, not in the sense of old-fashioned study skills, but in terms of monitoring their own learning so that they invest time in actively developing their potential. (ND)

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Student Teachers and Curriculum Change

Carol MacLennan

ABSTRACT

The current review of teacher education in Hong Kong mirrors a similar appraisal of the education system in the USA (Goodlad, 1984). The education of todays' student teachers will play a crucial role in furthering measures for future educational reform. How local students perceive their present courses and their prospective role in the renewal process is of considerable interest. The curriculum content, aims and objectives for teacher education courses are usually clearly set out in course prescriptions, course calendars and course outlines. This study was undertaken to determine (a) if the aims and objectives identified by various groups of students, preservice, inservice uncertificated and inservice certificated reflect those set out in official course prescriptions; (b) in what ways these aims are similar; and (c) in what ways they are different from officially stated course prescriptions. The findings from each group are presented and the implications for future teacher education courses are discussed.

The aim of the study

This study was carried out to determine what student teachers believe are the aims and objectives of their teacher education courses and how these compare with the official prescriptions set out in course handbooks. What today's student teachers in Hong Kong think about education, schools and the teacher education courses they are currently undertaking is of considerable importance to the future of education and schooling in the territory. Possible implications of the results are discussed.

Background to the study

Politicians and law-makers may legislate, administrators may direct, educators may prescribe, school principals may enforce, but it is the teachers at the chalk face who implement whatever decisions are made. It is teachers, moreover, who transform these decisions into classroom teaching and who engineer learning procedures which are accessible to students.

The road to educational improvement in Hong Kong is paved with worthwhile innovations (Morris, 1993). Most of these potentially useful approaches have foundered on hard-headed teacher pragmatism. Teachers, however, are faced with an impossible task since conflicting messages are delivered to them. On the one hand the view of teacher as technician has rightly been discredited (Barrow, 1984; Tang, 1994; Schulman, 1986) but on the other the 'top down' decision-making procedure effectively confines teachers to the technician mould. Each new approach or method continues to be presented to teachers, almost as a fait accompli with which they have to contend rather than emerging from consultations in which their views are fully represented.

The role of the teacher overtly becomes to implement whatever new measures have been put in place by the Education Department. They are required to teach according to the latest approach in the cycle of innovations to find favour in the territory. Activity, communicative and Target Oriented Curriculum are among those currently in vogue.

Teachers know, however, that their actual task does not change. This covert task is to obtain passing grades in HKCEE for as many pupils as possible.

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Hong Kong's exam-oriented education system focuses narrowly on education as a *product*. Parents, students, the general public and even teachers themselves have come to accept the narrow view that a pass in HKCEE, a teaching qualification or a University degree are what education "is all about". Therefore teachers know that despite the conflicting messages they receive their main task is product-oriented, that is, to get passes for pupils in HKCEE. On the one hand teachers are encouraged to implement new measures but on the other the strangle-hold of the examination system remains in place to counter even the most potentially forward-thinking developments

Unfortunately, what is neglected is the *process* by which education is achieved. Education is about change, change in the way things are achieved as well as in what is achieved. It is the quality of the learning process which constitutes the quality of the education students are receiving. This aspect of education appears to be seriously undervalued.

It is this confusing educational context that new teachers have to contend with at the start of their careers. Some of the views they now hold and the concerns which they believe will affect them before they officially enter the profession are the touched upon in this study

Research Questions

The following research question was addressed.

1. What do students teachers say are the overall aims of a teacher education course and do these participants' responses reflect the aims set out in course prescriptions?

Participants Participants included a group of 58 uncertificated preservice student (PU) teachers in their second or third of a teacher education course, one group of certificated inservice teachers (IC) and one group of uncertificated inservice teachers (IU). A total of 95 questionnaires were returned representing a 98% return rate for the preservice group, a 50% return rate for the IC group and a 33% return rate for the IU group. The samples were opportunistic comprising students and teachers currently enrolled for various teacher education courses at the HKIED in the 1994/95 academic year. The age range was 17-40.

Materials A questionnaire was designed to obtain comments from participants about the aims of teacher education courses.

Procedure The questionnaire was administered during normally scheduled lecture periods related to education and schools.

Data analysis A set of categories was compiled from questionnaire responses. These categories are shown in Table 1.

Results and Discussion The compulsory subjects for all student teachers in the former Colleges of Education included Education and English. Only these aims can be addressed in this paper. Although the Hong Kong Institute of Education was set up in 1994 students are still completing the two and three years courses for which they had previously

enrolled. During this period of transition the aims prescribed in the booklet introducing the Colleges (ED, 1993, p.7) are still in place. These aims are shown in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 1 shows that only 5% of the student participants in their responses to Question 1 refer to career or personal development aims while the introductory document (ED, 1993) states that 'to develop students' full potential and 'to encourage them to achieve the highest degree of individual potential possible' are the main general aims of the teacher education courses. Participants, however, refer to personal development in relation to furthering their careers by gaining an additional qualification rather than on committing themselves to improving their own learning. The focus of their responses, moreover, is not on developing individual potential, but includes rather vague comments such as 'learn(ing) more about education' and 'learn more skills of teaching'.

'Serving the community by nurturing the young' (p,7) is also set out as a long term aim. Table 1 shows that 33% of the respondents consider category 2 to be the overall purpose of a teacher education course. Participants comments in this category could be regarded as similar to 'serving the community' since they focus mainly on the improvement of education and of Hong Kong society in general. The means by which these aims are to be achieved are not suggested. The latter part of this long-term aim, 'nurturing the young' is reflected in category 6 where concern for their pupils is noted as a major aim by
6% of respondents.

It is clear that the Education Department recognises the change element inherent in education since one of the stated aims is that young teachers should learn to be 'agents of change' in the community. This aim, however, is not reflected in any of the responses to the questionnaire, which is a rather serious omission.

The official aims set out for the Education component of the teachers' course list teaching students 'to plan, design and deliver criterion-referenced instruction' 'to create and maintain productive relationships', 'to work effectively within an organization' and 'to establish a sound rationale for . . . all decision making concerned with school practices'. None of these items are spelled out in students' responses. However, students may be generalising by using category 4, which received the highest percentage (51%) return, to cover such individual items. This fourth category is a 'catch-all' classification which includes all respondents comments relating to practical teaching.

The aims for the English language component of the course are similarly not reflected in the responses of most participants. 'Language improvement' and 'increasing the depth of English subject knowledge receive little attention from respondents. Improving the depth of subject knowledge' is referred to by only 1% while the additional aim, to develop awareness of 'the cultural and linguistic background' of the language, was not included in any responses.

The English Language Studies module also emphasises the need for improved language proficiency, referring specifically to 'communicative' and 'interpersonal skills.' None of the participants refer to these items. Their main focus throughout appears to be the gaining of unspecified practical teaching skills or what is even more vaguely termed 'learning to be a good teacher'. These simplistic aims do not reflect awareness of the dedication to learning required of a teacher nor of the complex nature of the career which they are entering.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 provides a breakdown of Table 1 showing the percentage responses for each of the three participant groups on each category. It will be noted that preservice students and the inservice certificated teachers both rate practical teaching as the main purpose of teacher education courses. Typical responses emphasise *training* rather than educating teachers, *practical* aspects of teaching and what they call 'relating to the *real* classroom situation.' The IC group also include comments such as ' to refresh our teaching knowledge and skills', which relate to their *inservice* status.

The inservice uncertificated IU group place their highest number of responses (64%) in category two. These idealistic comments state that benefits to society such as 'improving the education system', 'strengthening and improving students' future qualifications' and 'improving the quality of teaching and learning' are what they regard as the most important purposes of a teacher education course. This is summed up by one comment that the long-term aims are 'not just focused on how to be an English teacher in a classroom but (are) also concerned on (sic) the changes and improvements in the upgrading of the English level in Hong Kong'.

The PU group alone among the three refer in 10% of their responses to 'helping their pupils,' to 'foster their future students' and 'to teach the teachers different basic skills to teach pupils'. The importance of theoretical issues is hardly noted at all. Although 9% of the IU group and 2% of the PU group have been placed in category 5 their comments such as 'to obtain some modern teaching methods' and to learn about what education is' are imprecise and hardly suggest the place of theory in teaching is well understood.

It is disappointing that the more experienced teachers in the study do not comment on the importance of theoretical issues in underpinning classroom practice and fail to note the valuable contribution theory makes to teacher education.

Conclusion

The research question addressed in this study considered whether the aims held by student participants matched those officially prescribed for a teacher education course. The results of the study indicate that there is a mismatch between official aims and the aims recognised by student participants.

These findings suggest that student teachers may be approaching their studies with a narrow view of education as a product rather than recognising the importance of the educational processes they are encouraged to engage in. It is disturbing that during the final phases of their teacher education course participants do not seem to have developed a mind set for controlling their learning or that they value learning as a process.

Students often fail to develop independence because they believe that only what is to be tested and graded is considered worth doing. This product-oriented view of education suggests that they do not fully understand the role independent study plays in tertiary education. It is the focus on the quality of the intellectual *processes* engaged in as they develop relevant knowledge, and the related intellectual skills which enable them to apply what they have learnt intelligently and with confidence, which education at the degree level demands.

Students may find the change from school to tertiary institution more confusing than course planners allow for. Student teachers may see little coherence within their courses and fail to receive a clear overview of how the seemingly unconnected units and modules fit together to prepare them to become teachers. The challenge for teacher educators may be that students still need to be taught how to learn, not in the sense of old-fashioned study-skills, but in terms of monitoring their own learning so that they invest time in actively developing their potential. This requires making a personal commitment to improving their language proficiency and setting up and monitoring their own goals for the achievement of these aims rather than simply trying to pass examinations.

As Cheng (1994, 16) points out the 'old hands' in the teaching profession are the most reluctant to subscribe to proposed changes. If today's students, as teachers of the future are to accept their role as agents of change in the community and fulfill the mission statement of the new HKIEd of which they are now a part, then it is time that they were helped to value education as a process in which they are energetically and actively involved instead of making the minimum commitments required to obtain a qualification.

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Table 1: Officially prescribed aims for a Teacher Education course compared to participants categorised responses

Hong Kong Education Department Colleges of Education (1993) Official aims (abbreviated)	***Q1. What are the overall purposes of a teacher education course?***	***Percentages Responses***
General Aims To develop students full potential To encourage the highest degree of individual development To gain satisfaction in serving the community To nurture the young To serve as agents of change ***Educational Aims*** Criterion-related instruction Productive relationships Fulfill organisational roles in society Establish a rationale for decision-making ***English Language*** To acquire knowledge and techniques to teach English To focus on the Linguistic and cultural background of English To improve language proficiency To develop communicative skills	***1.Personal*** : career, personal development ***2.Moral/ idealistic***: improvement of education/ society ***3.Subject Knowledge***: interested in gaining in-depth knowledge of the subject. ***4.Practical Teaching:*** Focus on basic skills; being a good teacher; training teachers ***5.Educational Theory:*** Focus on *more* than practical skills; theories, models, principles of learning; Goes beyond the technician view. ***6.Pupils needs:*** indicates major concern with helping pupils or improving their learning. ***7.Supply/demand:*** to fill quotas; to provide enough teachers	5% 33% 1% 51% 2% 6% 3%

Table 2 Comparison of participants responses - Inter-Group Totals

Q.1. What, in your, opinion are the overall purposes of a teacher education course?

Group	1 career	2 society	3 subject	4 teaching	5 theory	6 pupils	7 quotas
PU	7%	29%	2%	48%	2%	10%	3%
IC	4%	27%	-	69%	-	-	-
IU	-	64%	-	27%	9%	-	-